

~~MEMORANDUM~~

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

SECRET

April 4, 1972

MEMORANDUM FOR DICK KENNEDY  
JOHN NEGROPONTE

FROM: Phil Odeen *PO*  
SUBJECT: Our Options in Southeast Asia

Most of the discussions of our options and possible actions during the current SEA crisis seem to focus on what we can do unilaterally. Yet, we all recognize that the key is not what we do but what the South Vietnamese do.

I suggest that we give more attention to what we can do to help the GVN to defeat the NVN attack. If we rely on bombing and the GVN copes with the NVN assault, the press will say, "U.S. aircraft bail out the ARVN." Such headlines do little to convince the American public that the Vietnamization policy has been a success. Thus, our emphasis both publicly and operationally should be on the ARVN role.

What follows are some random thoughts on what we might do now to help the ARVN.

ON-FILE NSC RELEASE INSTRUCTIONS APPLY

Military Actions

As you know, my personal prejudice is that our air operations are not likely to be crucial to the outcome of the MR-1 battle. The real question is, will the ARVN stand and fight effectively. U.S. efforts should focus on how we can help them do this. Our options are limited, but there are some things we might do:

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2- Provide whatever tactical airlift is needed to move reinforcements. MACV has undoubtedly done this, but we should make sure.

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-- Help the GVN plan an amphibious end-run, to cut off the NVN forces and regain lost ground. ✓

-- Replace equipment (e. g., artillery) lost during the initial attacks. ✓

-- Provide specialized logistics and maintenance support. This might include moving some U.S. support units north.

-- Return some limited number of key advisors. Could we find 15 or 20 former advisors to the ARVN who were exceedingly effective during their tours or who have excellent relations with the key Vietnamese commanders? If so, let's send them back on 30 days TDY.

-- Provide funds for some financial incentive for the ARVN. The units moved north are liable to have serious desertion problems. Could we provide some special relocation pay? Perhaps we could provide some financial incentives to leaders or soldiers who perform in an outstanding manner.

-- Prod the GVN to fire some incompetent commanders. Our advisors know which leaders need to be replaced. If a key commander blows it, let's press the GVN hard to get rid of him. This could have significant military as well as psychological impact.

### Psychological Steps

This is the big test for the GVN and the ARVN. Are they treating it as such? If there is more that they can do, we should press hard to get them to act. For example, the CIA report today stated, "Saigon was calm." This beats having a panic, but one would hope a more positive spirit would emerge.

-- Tet 68 was a real turning point for the GVN. The current attack provides another opportunity to mobilize support and attack problems that seemed beyond solution a week ago.

-- Has Thieu been on radio and TV accusing NVN of a blatant attack, violation of the Geneva accord, etc? If not, why not?

In laying out a series of steps, we believe the GVN should take it as important to remember they will equivocate and resist. Thus, we should overbid, hoping that some fraction of the needed actions are taken.